

COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF SCHOOL  
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDANT  
FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS

5 July 1943

AIR MAIL

Lt Gen Robert L. Eichelberger  
APO 301 , c/o Postmaster  
San Francisco, Calif

Dear Eich:

Your report on the Buna Campaign with its accompanying note of 17 June is a windfall to me and to the School. I am sincere in this acknowledgment.

From the SWPA we have had very little informal<sup>inval</sup> material of the proper command and staff level. Only last week did Willoughby, enroute to Washington, give us a comprehensive view of the situation obtaining in your theater.

Therefore, with the above explanation and apology, you can appreciate how glad we are to get your report. In order that we may keep on the beam and be of some value to the field forces I must have your current operations to guide our instructors along lines incident to this War, not WW I. Particularly, could you have one of your staff keep in mind our needs and ultimately furnish us, from time to time, with interesting operational material — field and administrative orders, staff reports, etc. from a corps or divisional level? Classified, I promise full security measures. With your help, I hope to overcome our ~~infernal~~ deficiencies in connection with the peculiar conditions inherent in operations in your theater. In this global war, graduates must have balanced instruction and not limited to a particular theater.


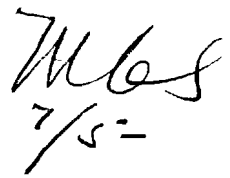
All of us send our very best wishes for your continued success. I envy you your job and would give all to be with you — in any capacity.

As ever

KARL TRUESDELL  
Maj Gen, U S A  
Comdt

# HEADQUARTERS FORT LEAVENWORTH

SUBJECT: Report of Buna Campaign- w. accompanying corres from Gen Michelberger  
(IDENTIFY THIS MEMORANDUM SLIP WITH PAPERS TO WHICH ATTACHED.) 17 June

TO	SUBJECT MATTER	FROM DATE AND INITIAL
Asst Comdt	1. Note basic communication together with reply. 2. Inclosure is of general interest to Inf Section in connection with jungle and shore to shore amphibean operations. The appendices also include specific G-data. Please circulate as necessary.	5 July 1943  KARL TRUESDELL Maj Gen USA Comdt
Col Kelly	Read + circulate to those taking part in instruction in jungle-warfare -	 MBS 7/5-

(USE REVERSE SIDE IF NECESSARY.)

1041-C&GSS-3-31-42-10M

**HEADQUARTERS I ARMY CORPS**  
**OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL**

June 17, 1918.

Maj. General Karl Truesdell,  
Command and General Staff School,  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Dear Truesdell:

Copies of the attached report have gone in through official channels. It strikes me however that you might be interested in reading our report of the Buna Campaign.

Today I read with great pleasure an article in the May issue of the Military Review written by Major Rudolph telling some very interesting side-lights on the campaign. Naturally I cannot speak with any authority as only the Ground Forces can do that but we did put a whole lot of time and effort into this report while leaving out things that were too controversial. If you and your good men find it of interest I would be glad to know it.

Give my affectionate regards to the Shallenbergers and the Lyceles and any other of my old friends you may see.

With warm regards,

Sincerely,





# HISTORY OF THE BUNA CAMPAIGN

Eichelberger

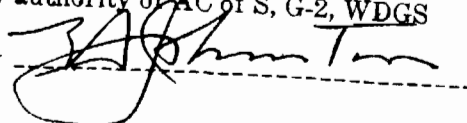
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5 AUG 1944


by authority of AC of S, G-2, WDGS

by



M. S. JOHNSTON  
Colonel, Infantry  
CUSTODIAN

December 1, 1942-January 25, 1943



For Karl Tresselt with the hope that this report will prove of interest  
R. L. Eichelberger  
1945

## FOREWORD

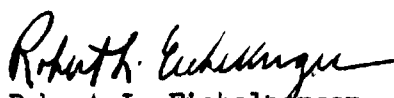
This report is an account of the participation of American troops in the Buna Campaign.

Historically, the campaign is important because it was the first victorious operation of American Army ground forces against the Japanese.

From a military standpoint, the campaign is important because it teaches lessons, the importance of which varies directly with the remaining number of jungle operations to be fought against the Japanese.

This report was written on our return to Australia after the campaign. The material incorporated was obtained from official records made on the field of battle and from subsequent personal interviews with authoritative individual participants.

Lastly, and most important of all, the purpose of this report is to aid those who fight under similar circumstances in the future. Its value may be judged by the Allied lives it saves. . . and the enemy it kills.

  
Robert L. Eichelberger  
Lieutenant General

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# I PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

## 1. Central Papua.

The area of the Papuan Campaign, to the date of writing, is roughly that of Map "A".

Since all maps and charts of this area are incomplete, the following information is based on carefully authenticated reports from competent ground and aerial observers.

General.--The Owen Stanley Range is the central ridge line of the Papuan peninsula. This backbone-like barrier rises steeply from the southwest coast to recede more gently to the northeast coast. At best it is a jagged, precipitous obstacle, crossed only by rain-soaked, hazardous, jungle tracks.

Numerous mountainous spurs run northeast and southwest from the Range. Up to 6,000 feet above sea level a large percentage of the area is covered with rain forest, while above to the tree line, is moss forest.

The ranges go up to 10,000 feet with peaks over 13,000 feet.

Winding their way down from these mountains are numerous rivers. In their upper reaches they are clear, fast rapids over rocky beds, but as they near the coast they widen to become slow and muddy with low, forest covered banks. During the wet season it is normal for these rivers frequently to flood coastal areas several miles in width.

Lines of Communications.--The only possible way to move by land from one coast of Papua to the other is by native track or trail. Because of the mountains and mud, none of these tracks is usable by motor transportation. There are no railroads in Papua.

While the immediate concern of this report is the Buna Combat Zone on the northeastern Papuan coast, a geographical explanation of the Theater of Operations should be made.



The Base Section of the Communications Zone was located in Australia. The Advance Section was located in Port Moresby. From Port Moresby to the Combat Zone there were but two routes over which supplies in bulk could be moved: by sea around Milne Bay, where there was a sub-base, and by air transport over the Owen Stanleys. It should be further noted that when the Japanese were being pushed back across the Owen Stanleys to Buna, there were NO adequate port installations on the northeast coast of Papua and only one usable air field: that of Japanese held Buna. To assist the American troops in their flights to the north shore of New Guinea, hasty air strips were established at Pongani and near Mt. Sapia, while the strip at Wanigela was improved.

## 2. The Buna Combat Zone.

General.--The Buna Combat Zone was located on the low-lying, flat coastal plain stretching inland from Gona and Buna to the foothills of the Owen Stanley Range.

The area is covered with dense jungle, reeking swamps, and scattered patches of kunai grass. Before the campaign it was largely unexplored by white man except along a few native tracks and from the air.

Off shore are many uncharted reefs. The sea, however, is usually calm and fog at sea level is unknown.

On the coast, at exactly  $8^{\circ} 38'$  South and  $148^{\circ} 26'$  East, lies Buna, which is variously known as Buna Mission or Buna Government Station. Buna Village, a cluster of native huts, is one-half mile to the northwest.

Before the Japanese arrived in the latter part of July, 1942, the Government Station had three European-type houses and about 260 native huts. Three whites and about 120 natives constituted the combined population of the Government Station and Buna

Village.

The key to Buna's tactical importance lay one and one-quarter miles south of the Government Station in a large patch of kunai grass--the air field. It ran northwest by southeast, was 800 yards long and about 60 yards wide when the meager Allied garrison retreated from Buna in July. During the next two months the Japanese extended the strip to 1,300 yards by 90 yards. Further, they put in blast bays and constructed a new strip 570 yards long and 60 yards wide immediately southeast of the Old Strip. Enemy planes were sighted for the first time on this new strip September 19, 1942. However, it was later found that this new strip was a dummy strip and the planes on it were, of course, dummies.

The importance of building and defending these strips is more evident in the light of associated distances:

Port Moresby. . . . .	102	air miles
Milne Bay . . . . .	200	" "
Townsville. . . . .	800	" "
Salamaua. . . . .	147	" "
Lae . . . . .	167	" "
Rabaul. . . . .	400	" "
Faisi . . . . .	525	" "

For the Japanese, Buna offered a base from which to raid nearby Allied installations, with fighter cover. For the Allies it could mean an air base unfettered by Port Moresby's weakness--the hazards of the Owen Stanley Range and its erratic weather.

Weather.--The weather in the Buna area is far from good but even so is better from an air point of view than that over the Owen Stanley Range. In the Buna area the temperature varies from a winter minimum of 64° to a summer maximum of 96° F. The mean relative humidity ranges between 78 and 85 percent. Thus a one degree variation in temperature is felt keenly by Europeans in the area.

The mean annual rainfall (for the past 12 years) in the Euna area is 113 inches, with November, December and January being



Creek near Sinemi Village before a rain



. . . after a rain

the wettest months. For these three months there is rain on an average of 14 to 17 days per month. Some of these rains defy description such as the torrential downpour of January 11, 1943,

when eight (8) inches were recorded.

During the wet season, which is from November to May, violent rain squalls or "Gubas" are frequent, though seldom lasting more than fifteen or twenty minutes. At times, gusts up to 40 miles per hour have been noted. Tropical cyclones or hurricanes are unknown. Between November and May the prevailing wind is the northwest monsoon while winds from the southeast may be expected during the remainder of the year.



Typical slit trench in Buna area after a rain

Soil.--The soil near the coast is a light, sandy loam while further inland there is a heavy loam. Since paved roads are unknown in this area, anything from an oozing, slippery layer of mud to impassable bogs are the order of the day for the handful of native tracks in the area.

Vegetation.--There is an unlimited supply of drinking water in the area and a tangled lush of vegetation. Ninety percent of the region is covered with a labyrinth of jungle and swamps. Remaining are patches of kunai grass. Patches of this grass range

from a few square feet in size to several square miles. The grass has broad, sharp-edged blades and grows to a height of six to seven feet. After being burnt off, tough, heavy tussocks remain.



Kunai grass in Buna area

The jungle in the area is a bewildering tangle of vegetation including many poison plants of which, however, only two are particularly troublesome: a stinging plant with a furry leaf and the thorny trailers of the lawyer vine (Climbing Calamus).

There are no stands of trees in the jungle which are of a uniform species but rather a large variety in any given small area. The pandanus probably predominates. The trees in general are soft wood and have wide buttress flanges--some of great size.

The swamps in the area were of vast tactical importance during the Buna Campaign. They are mostly nipa and mangrove and varied in depth from inches to well over a soldier's head. They are a stinking jumble of twisted, slime-covered roots and muddy "soup".

Both the jungle and the swamps give complete cover from aerial reconnaissance. For ground troops, however, any sort of

observation or orientation is tremendously difficult.



Typical front line position near Buna Village area.

The only food available in the area is from small, scattered native gardens which had been thoroughly stripped by the Japanese. The usual crops are taro, yams, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, papaya (pawpaw), bananas and breadfruit.

There are two principal coconut plantations in the combat area. Immediately around and to the east of the Government Station is one, and at Cape Endaladere is another.

Natives and Wild Life.--The natives in the Combat Zone were at one time war-like and suspected of cannibalism. However, they are now considered largely missionized and loyal to the Allies. Any sort of bombing put fear in their hearts and, with rare exception, they were found worthless for patrolling.

Wild life in the area includes wild pigs, a few species of fowl, and a few wallabies. While poisonous snakes are reported as numerous, few were actually killed during the campaign. Likewise, few crocodiles were seen.

Health.--Throughout the whole of New Guinea, including the Buna Combat Zone, the mosquito is considered as formidable an enemy as the Japanese. Europeans in New Guinea before the war looked upon malaria as Americans in the United States consider the common cold. Medical reports of the Buna Campaign (see Appendix, Annex #4, Inclosure "E") do not disprove this observation. As a matter of fact, the north shore of Papua is one of the worst infected malarial areas in the world.

Beside the ravages of malaria, dengue fever is also a common malady, while deadly blackwater fever is less common.

Both bacillary and amoebic dysentery are an ever-present possibility, as are jungle ulcers. The smallest scratch or cut must be treated instantly or infection will set in.

Sand flies are common along the coast. They are small enough to penetrate the average mosquito net, and to scratch their bite is to invite jungle ulcers.

Leeches are fairly common but can be removed by a touch of a cigarette or burning match. Any break they have caused in the skin must be treated against infection.

Scrub typhus, carried primarily by the numerous chiggers (*Thrombicula Akamushi*) in the area and secondarily by fleas infected by contaminated Japanese, developed during the campaign. There is no known inoculation against this disease.

Ring worm, Dhobi itch, "athlete's foot" and hook worm are also medical problems in the area. While gonorrhea and granuloma are common among the natives, most native women were hidden in the interior during the campaign.

Strategical Influences.--The terrain factors influencing the strategy of the Buna Campaign were vital considerations. (A pictorial presentation of them will be found in Map "B").

The Japanese positions were roughly at (1) Gona, (2) along the Soputa-Sanananda track and (3) in a perimeter, based on the sea, with Buna Village its right flank and the coast just below Cape Endaiadere its left flank.

Leading to these positions were five somewhat dependable native tracks:

1. Jumbora to Gona.
2. Soputa to Sanananda.
3. Soputa to Buna Village.
4. Dobodura to the Buna air strips.
5. The Coastal track north through Cape Endaiadere.

Conspicuously missing were any means of lateral communications for the Allies. Further, the swamp and jungle between each of these five tracks were such that cutting lateral tracks was a practical impossibility with rare exception.

In the Gona-Sanananda area the Japanese placed their positions on the only dry ground available. In the Buna area they did even better:



Coconut plantation at Cape Endaiadere. Note enemy bunkers.



## The Buna Positions

The Japanese terrain utilization between Buna Village and the coconut plantation at Cape Endaiadere was perfect. With the sea to their rear, they anchored their right flank on Buna Village where the unfordable Girua River and Entrance Creek enter the sea. Since the wet season was at hand, it could be expected that the river frequently would flood the Soputa - Buna Village track--the only track approaching the Japanese right.

From Buna Village the Japanese perimeter followed Entrance Creek inland to where the Soputa Track forks to Buna Village and the Government Gardens. From this point the perimeter reached east across the intervening swamp to the northeastern edge of the Old Strip, down the strip to turn east along the New Strip and extend through the coconut plantation to the sea.

Naturally, the strips gave the enemy fields of fire. Further, the impassable, jungled swamp between the Dobodura - Strips track and the Soputa - Buna Village track precluded lateral communications between Allied forces attacking the Japanese flanks. For the Americans it was a two day march from their left flank near Buna Village to their right flank below Cape Endaiadere. But, at the same time, the terrain inside the Japanese perimeter was such that they could move reinforcements quickly to any threatened point by truck or marching.

Thus, the enemy's brilliant terrain utilization canalized all potential Allied attacks into four narrow fronts: (1) through the swamp in front of Buna Village, (2) against the fork, or so-called "Triangle", of the Soputa-Buna track, (3) across the narrow bridge between the strips, and (4) through the coconut plantation below Cape Endaiadere.

## II GENERAL TACTICAL BACKGROUND

### 1. Early Japanese movements in Southwest Pacific Area (See Map "C").

Twenty-eight days after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese bombed Rabaul. Seventeen days later they dropped their first bombs on New Guinea--with Lae, Salamaua, and Bulolo as targets. Two days later, on January 23, 1942, they landed in force at Rabaul and soon dispersed the meagre Australian garrison to the nearby mountains. Thus came the Japanese to the Solomon Sea area.

With Rabaul air strips ready for operations, Port Moresby was raided for the first time on February 3. Exactly one week later the Japanese landed at Gasmata, New Britain, half way between Rabaul and the northeastern coast of New Guinea. This was five days before Singapore fell, February 15.

On March 8, the Japanese staged large-scale landings at Lae and Salamaua. Two days later, they bombed Buna. Meanwhile, in the Netherland East Indies, the Battle for Java had virtually ended.

As the enemy moved down the Solomon chain on the eastern side of the Solomon Sea, Washington announced on March 17 the arrival of American troops in Australia. Simultaneously came news of the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur in Australia.

During April, the Japanese occupied Faisi in the Solomons and during the early part of May gathered in Tulagi and Guadalcanal. On May 6, Corregidor fell and the Battle of the Coral Sea started. Enemy convoys moving south--for Port Moresby as it was later disclosed--were intercepted and on the 11th were turned back.

During June, in the Solomon Sea area, the Japanese consolidated; while to the northeast, his naval forces were again defeated,

this time at Midway.

On July 22, some twelve days after the enemy occupied Kiska, in the Aleutians, they landed in force at Gona, a few miles northwest of Buna on the Papuan coast. In a matter of hours they were in Buna and pushing southwest towards Port Moresby. By July 28 they were in contact with the Australians at Kokoda, high in the Owen Stanley Range which separates Buna from Port Moresby by 100 air miles.

Came August and in the Netherland East Indies, the Japanese were completing their occupation. In the Solomon Islands the U. S. Marines on the 7th landed at Tulagi, Florida and Guadalcanal to establish beach heads, the defense of which is now legend.

On August 26 the Japanese landed at Milne Bay, southeastern tip of Papua. But it was an ill-fated venture. After fanatically attacking the numerically superior Australian garrison the depleted Japanese force fell back. By September 8, it was believed that they had evacuated a part of their remaining troops and it was known that only a handful of starving stragglers were left to work their way up the Papuan coast to the Buna base.

However, from Buna in the Kokoda region the Japanese were faring better. (See Map "A"). More than 5000 pushed forward over the Owen Stanley Range by the Kokoda trail. The Australian garrison was in retreat. Day by day the Japanese drove toward Port Moresby. Despite the steep, cragged mountain tracks, the rain-soaked, fever-breeding, tangled jungle, they advanced. By September 14, the Japanese were within 20-odd air miles of Port Moresby on what is known as the Imita Range. There the Australians held. There the terrain and Allied air attacks overcame the Japanese supply line from Buna.

Two weeks of stalemate followed. Behind the Allied lines

there was feverish activity. In Australia the 126th and 128th Infantry combat teams of the 32d U. S. Division were alerted. Less their artillery, they prepared to move.

September 25 found the 128th Infantry, and a detachment of the 126th Infantry, flown into Port Moresby. Three days later, when the remainder of the 126th arrived by boat, the 128th Infantry was opening a trail in the Goldie River Valley on the Australians' left flank.

As elements of the 126th Infantry on the right flank worked toward Juare over the almost impassable Kapa Kapa track, the Australians launched their counter attack on the Kokoda track. Slowly the Japanese fell back. Neither American force was in contact.

Meanwhile, an old landing strip at Wanigela, on the northeastern Papuan coast, was made serviceable by the Allied garrison there. By October 18, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 128th Infantry had been flown into Wanigela.

From Wanigela, these units attempted the march over-land to Pongani but their forward elements found the Musa River Valley an impassable quagmire. The over-land plan was abandoned in favor of a ferry service incorporating small boats.

Two of these small boats off Pongani were bombed later by one of our own planes. The advance ground forces had not notified the Air Corps of the ferry service, and the pilot did not waste any time checking to make sure his targets were Japanese. Results: two killed and six wounded.

As the units at Wanigela were being ferried to Pongani, the Anti-Tank Company, the Cannon Company and the 2d Battalion of the 126th Infantry were moving overland from Moresby to Juare.

On November 2, two enemy transports were sighted 93 miles off Buna and were heavily attacked by our air units. One hit and several

near misses were claimed. The convoy turned back. It was believed no troops landed.

On the same day, the Australians entered Kokoda. The Japanese had fallen back to Oivi. At Pongani a new strip was in operation and at Mount Sapia, to the south, another strip was nearing completion. Across the Solomon Sea, the Japanese, with complete disregard for their casualties, were hammering the Marine defenses on Guadalcanal. At Lae, Japanese air reinforcements were reported.

In the Buna-Oivi area the strength of the retreating enemy was now estimated at 4,000. Identifications gave the Oivi-Wairopi area the remnants of three battalions of the 144th Infantry, one battalion of pack artillery, a company of engineers and a part of one battalion of the 41st Infantry. In the Buna area it was believed that there were two battalions of the 41st Infantry and Line of Communication Troops.

## 2. Initial contact in The Buna Area.

By mid-November when General MacArthur authorized American patrolling to contact the enemy, all three battalions of the 128th Infantry were advancing up the coast from their base at Pongani. The 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry, was at Bofu with the remaining two battalions enroute to Bofu from Pongani. The Australians were crossing the Kumusi River at Wairopi in pursuit of the disorganized enemy in that area.

On the night of November 18 - 19, Japanese destroyers, reported to number four or five, and a Japanese cruiser were sighted off the coast north of Buna. Despite our air attacks, some enemy troops were landed.

Also, Japanese air power was coming into play. Between November 20 and the end of the month, scarcely a day passed that our troops were not bombed or strafed. In turn, our air was giving the

Japanese little respite.

During the night of November 19, elements of the Australian 25th Brigade entered Gona, only to withdraw because of a shortage of ammunition. (See Map "B").

Meanwhile, the 126th Infantry (less the 1st and 2d Battalions) crossed the Girua River and joined the Australian units moving on Soputa. They thereupon came under Australian command.

By November 20, elements of the 128th Infantry were reported in contact with the enemy on a line roughly located 700 yards south of Cape Endaiadere and running inland to the New Strip. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 128th Infantry, were on the line while the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry, was in reserve.

While the Americans near the New Strip were feeling out the enemy positions in that area, the 2d Battalion, 128th Infantry, moved to Gerua Gardens on the track from Soputa. The 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry, followed. Enemy resistance was weak until the Americans neared Entrance Creek where the track forks, northwest to Buna Village and northeast to the coast below Buna Mission. Being held up here, the Americans moved into the swamp between the track and Girua River and, unopposed, advanced toward Buna Village. Near the Village they were stopped by prepared defensive positions.

Thus, ended the meeting engagement. The Girua River was the boundary between the two Allied Forces: the Seventh Australian Division, reinforced by the 126th U. S. Infantry (less two battalions), west of the river, was commanded by Major General G. A. Vasey; and the 32d U. S. Division (less the 127th Infantry, Division Artillery and elements of the 126th Infantry), east of the river, was commanded by Major General E. F. Harding. Both forces were part of the Advanced New Guinea Force, commanded by Lieutenant-General E. F. Herring of the Australian Army.

From the meeting engagement until the end of the month there was a virtual stalemate along the entire front. West of the Girua River, the enemy had taken up positions north of Soputa, on the Sanananda Track, and at Gona. They were on the only dry ground in the area and from these positions the enemy pinned down the swamp-ridden Seventh Australian Division.

East of the Girua River, the enemy was in strength behind prepared defenses organized in depth. These positions were also on dry ground and were placed so as to take full advantage of the terrain's canalization of any possible attack. Thus, was the 32d U. S. Division held up near Buna Village on the left and near the New Strip on the right.

During this stalemate, the Japanese, on the night of November 25 - 26, attempted to reinforce their Buna garrison. An unspecified number of enemy naval units were located north of Buna. Despite our continuous air attacks, the enemy landed some troops; however, it was believed they suffered heavy losses.

Again, on the night of November 27, the day the 127th Combat Team (less artillery) arrived in Port Moresby by boat, enemy naval units were reported off Buna--but this time our air search proved negative.

### 3. Summary of situation at the end of November.

By the end of November, the American Air Corps had successfully performed the prodigious job of moving thousands of American ground troops by air over mountainous jungle terrain. It had laid in limited supplies for the ground troops. It had made the Australian counterattack possible by its successful, though perilous, supply dropping in the misty, craggy reaches of the Kokoda track. It had continuously bombed and strafed Japanese positions. It had pared Japanese naval potentialities.

Unhappiest of November's hard realizations was the plight of the Buna ground forces. In this, their gruelling baptism of fire, they found the Japanese in perfect defensive positions. The Japanese left flank was based on the tidal, unfordable Girua River and Entrance Creek; their right flank was based on the sea as was their rear. To their front was thick jungle bogged into deep swamps traversed by tracks which canalized any American attack into narrow fronts against prepared positions.

Further, for weeks before initial contact, the Americans had fought the sapping heat, the mud, the weird night noises, the stench of the swamps, the jungle diseases. They were far from being fresh troops and were receiving no more than two lean meals per day.

The Allied supply picture was not bright. "Railheads" were newly constructed air strips at Dobodura and Popondetta except for the right flank force, south of Cape Endaiadere, which was supplied by small boats along the coast.

While the Air Force and the Transportation Corps were doing a good job moving requested supplies, the 32d Division had not announced a definite commitment on their daily minimum requirements.

Another unhappy reality was the weakening of the chain of command in the 32d Division. The terrain was, in itself, one unavoidable contributing factor, but the mixing of units could have been avoided. In some instances even platoons of different companies were under the same command.

The plight of the American ground forces was well known to the Commander-in-Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area, General Douglas MacArthur, as was the ever present possibility of an enemy reinforcement by sea.

Thus it was at midnight of November 29 - 30 when orders were



received by Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, Commanding General, I Corps (US), to proceed by air transport from Rockhampton, Australia, to Port Moresby where he was to receive instructions relative to assuming command of the American and Allied troops in the Buna Area. (The artillery was Australian). General Eichelberger was authorized to bring an accompanying staff to include his Chief of Staff, six staff officers, his aide and nine enlisted men.

### III OPERATIONS

#### 1. First Break-Through to the Sea December 1 - 5

At 0958L 1 December, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, Commanding General, I Corps (US), landed at Dobodura Strip #3. He was accompanied by his Chief of Staff, six staff officers, his aide and nine enlisted men. The previous night had been spent at Port Moresby where General Eichelberger and his accompanying staff had received instructions and a brief orientation.

At 1300L 1 December, General Eichelberger assumed command of the Buna Area.

The Division plans for an attack on December 2 were already in operation and were left untouched, while arrangements were completed to have the I Corps Assistants Chief of Staff G-2 and G-3 witness the attack on the right (in the New Strip area), and General Eichelberger on the left (in the Buna Village area).

During the night of December 1 - 2, Allied planes sighted and attacked enemy naval units landing troops just north of Buna. While our air attacks were vigorous, dawn disclosed 26 enemy landing barges on the beach near Sanananda. It was estimated that the enemy had successfully landed 1,000 troops.

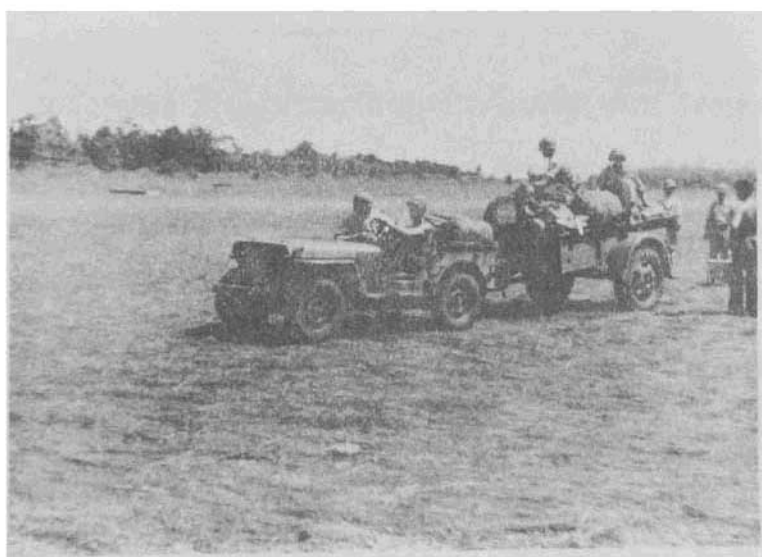
The American ground attack of December-2 jumped off on schedule . . . but proved abortive. The Corps Commander personally witnessed the failure of the attack in the Buna Village area, and the I Corps Assistants Chief of Staff G-2 and G-3 witnessed the unenthusiastic feint in the New Strip area.

General MacArthur had told the Corps Commander he would find our forces "strong in the rear areas and weak in the forward areas". This proved true.

During December 3 - 4 the American forces were reorganized. General Harding, Division Commander, was relieved by Brigadier General Albert W. Waldron, former Division Artillery Officer; Colonel John W. Mott, commander of the American left flank force--hereafter to be known as the Urbana Force, was relieved by Colonel John E. Grose, I Corps Inspector General; and Colonel J. Tracey Hale, Jr., commander of the American right flank force--hereafter to be known as the Warren Force, was relieved by Colonel Clarence A. Martin, I Corps G-3.

Both Colonel Grose and Colonel Martin were Infantrymen and had had combat experience in the last war.

Units had been badly intermixed and were reformed. On the Urbana front, the 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry, was placed on the left and the 2d Battalion, 128th Infantry, on the right. On the Warren front, the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, was placed in the line extending from the south edge of the New Strip to the sea; and the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, in reserve, was placed behind the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry. The 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry, was reformed south of the bridge between the Old and New Air Strips.



A 1/4-ton truck and 1-ton trailer at Dobodura. On December 5 the total motor transportation used by American forces in the Buna area numbered seven 1/4-ton trucks with three 1-ton trailers.

Also, during December 4, decisive steps were taken to finish investigation of supply installations and the correction of their shortcomings. Previously, our troops had not been receiving enough to eat.

At 1030L 5 December, following aerial, artillery and mortar preparations, the Warren and Urbana Forces jumped off in a coordinated attack. On both fronts, the attack met heavy resistance. Our artillery and mortar preparations had not neutralized enemy positions.

On the Warren front, five Bren Gun Carriers leading the attack were knocked out thirty minutes after the jump-off. Enemy resistance was concentrated in log barricades and bunkers, organized in depth and mutually supporting. Snipers were active. Throughout the day, the Warren Force determinedly hammered enemy positions, but by nightfall our gains were negative.

On the Urbana front, however, progress during the day was more encouraging. The enemy were in barricades and bunkers, but by dint of determined leadership our line advanced. A platoon of G Company, 126th Infantry, under command of Staff Sergeant Herman J. Bottcher, drove a wedge through to the sea between Buna Village and Buna Mission.

By 1630L, when orders for consolidation were issued, the Urbana left was pressed up tight against the enemy defenses around Buna Village, and well dug in along our corridor to the sea. On the Urbana right, we occupied the entire west bank of Entrance Creek with the one exception of The Coconut Grove, which constituted a dangerous reentrant in our lines with unlimited possibilities for reinforcement and attack by our enemies.

During the Urbana attack, General Waldron had been shot through the shoulder. The Corps Commander replaced him, in command

of the forward elements of the 32d Division, with Brigadier General Clovis E. Byers, I Corps Chief of Staff.

In conclusion, the attack of December 5 established the strength and disposition of the enemy on the Warren front, and the isolation of Buna Village. Since the terrain and condition of troops in the Urbana Force precluded immediate assaults, continued pressure and advance by infiltration were ordered preliminary to the successive reduction of Buna Village, The Coconut Grove and The Island.









BUNA MISSION  
(GOV'T. STN.)

GIROPA PT

BUNA VILLAGE

Island

Entrance

Creek

3rd of 5000

Triangle

To Gerug Gardens

F 28(-2 Plt)  
1-37 MM  
1 Plat. HMG-128  
2-81 MM  
1 Sec. LMG 128

Can 128

2 126

87th

87th

BUNBA FRONT

Situation Map

2000 4 Dec 52

Scale 1:6,400

500 0 500 YDS





BUNA MISSION  
(GOV. STN.)

GIROPA PT.

BUNA VILLAGE

G I26

Island

Entrance

Government  
Gardens

F I28 (-2 Pls)  
1-37 MM  
1 Plat. HMG I28  
2-81 MM  
1 Sec. LMG I28

Con I28  
E I26  
F I26  
H I28

E I28

GIROPA GARDENS

The Triangle

4-81 MM I28

4-81 MM I28

G I28

GIROPA GARDENS

URBANA FRONT

5th Army Map

17 Dec 1942

Captured Fireworks

Captured Bullets

Captured Life Lines

Scale 1:6,400

500 0 500 YDS



STRIP PT.

Old Strip

New Strip

A 126

6 Ind

126  
1007

WARREN FRONT

Situation Map

0800L 1 Dec. 1942





CAPE ENDAIADERE

STRIP PT.

Old Strip

New Strip

126

6 Ind.

128

WARREN FRONT

Situation Map

2000 4 Dec 1942



## 2. Capture of Buna Village

December 6 - 14

The period of December 6 to, and including, December 13 was one of preparation for the vicious and persistent attacks starting on December 14.

During the period, the Advanced Echelon, Headquarters, I Corps (US) and Headquarters, 32d Division were merged into Headquarters Buna Force (US) under the command of General Eichelberger; and front line units were reorganized and energized. Rations were increased, patrolling became extensive. Daily, our lines inched forward to better positions from which to attack.

On the Urbana front the enemy was not complacent. Our line was a noose about the neck of Buna Village. Twice, the enemy from both the Village and Buna Mission attacked our corridor to the sea. Each time the attack was thrown back.

Also, during the period the supply situation was improved by reorganization and a conference, at which definite priorities were set up on definite daily minimum requirements; and the headquarters of the 126th Infantry was transferred by the G.O.C., New Guinea Forces, from the Sanananda to the Buna front.

In the Sanananda area (Australian command), the only change was the taking of Gona (December 9) by elements of the 21st and 25th Australian Brigades.

With the arrival of Headquarters, 126th Infantry, the Corps Commander placed Lieutenant Colonel Clarence M. Tomlinson, Regimental Commander, in command of the Urbana Force. The approximate effective strength of the Urbana Force was 55 officers and 1062 enlisted men, and the approximate effective strength of the Warren Force was 114 officers and 1955 enlisted men. (These strengths are based on figures quoted in the G-3 Periodic Report

0400L to 1700L 10 December, Headquarters, Buna Force (US).

Throughout the American sector, the morale of the troops was gradually improving. This morale increase is noteworthy in that it paralleled a slight increase in the malaria and dengue fever rate and the commencement of torrential nightly rains which turned the jungle into a miserable morass of sucking mud. Contributing factors to the improvement of morale were more aggressive leadership, more food and the arrival of elements of the 127th Infantry.

As these elements arrived at Dobodura and Popondetta by plane, they were moved to the vicinity of Ango for a short period of conditioning. By December 11, I and K Companies, 127th Infantry, were ready and put into the line around Buna Village, relieving the 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry.

To their rear, the mortars of the Urbana Force had been organized into batteries. Each battery had registered in and firing data had been plotted into fire control charts.

Thus, the stage was set for a coordinated attack on Buna Village at 0700L 14 December.

During the night of 13 - 14 December, our air reconnaissance again sighted an enemy convoy moving toward Buna. Bombing missions were dispatched; however, the enemy succeeded in landing an estimated 1000 troops near the mouth of the Mambare River and 200 near the mouth of the Kumusi River.

At 0700L, 14 December, I and K Companies, 127th Infantry, jumped off following mortar and artillery preparations on Buna Village. Enemy resistance was not strong and by 1000L the Village was ours. Most of the enemy had evacuated. Fifty enemy dead were buried.



Captured Japanese bunker in Buna Village

With Buna Village in hand, the Corps Commander now turned his attention to Buna Mission. However, before the Mission could be attacked it was necessary to protect the Urbana right flank from the dangerous enemy salient constituted by The Coconut Grove and The Triangle, 300 yards to the southeast, on opposite side of Entrance Creek.

Thus, the next mission of the Urbana Force became the capture of The Coconut Grove and The Triangle.





BUNA MISSION  
(GOV T. STN.)

GIROPA PT

BUNA VILLAGE

Island

I 128 (-2)  
37 MM  
Plat. HMG  
2-81 MM  
1 Sec LMG 128

K 127

I 127

E 128

Grassland

The Triangle

To Gerun Gardens

Scale 1:6400

500 0 500 YDS.





BUNA MISSION  
(COMM. STN.)

GIROFA PT

BUNA VILLAGE

2

128 (-2 Flt)  
-37 MM  
1 Plt. HMG 128  
1 Sec. LMG 128

E 128

Roa Triangle

URBANA FRONT

Situation Map  
1700L 14 Dec 1942

Captured Breastworks  
Captured Bunkers  
Captured Fire Positions

Scale 1:6,400

500 0 500 YDS



### 3. Capture of The Coconut Grove, and Preparation on Warren Front December 15 - 17

The period of December 15 to, and including, December 17 was characterized by continuous attacks on the Urbana front, and preparation for attack on the Warren front.

The capture of Buna Village contributed to a high level of morale in the Urbana Force and, in order to exploit this condition, no time was lost in attacking The Coconut Grove on the west bank of Entrance Creek. At 1500L 16 December, a mortar and artillery preparation was placed on The Grove. Twenty minutes later, the preparation lifted and E and F Companies (less detachments), 128th Infantry, charged forward. However, their attack was short-lived for, again, our mortar and artillery preparation had failed to neutralize enemy positions.

General Byers had assisted in launching the attack and shortly after the jump-off was shot through the right hand.

By sundown, our troops managed to reach the edge of The Grove but were unable to enter it. Throughout the night, with its drenching rain, our troops clung to their positions and with dawn, December 17, charged and over-ran The Grove to kill 37 Japanese and take one prisoners--a wounded sergeant.

Now, only The Triangle remained to be eliminated before an attack could be launched to isolate Buna Mission by driving through to the sea between the Mission and Giropa Point.

G Company, 128th Infantry, had been containing The Triangle from the south and was given the mission of taking it out with the assistance of E Company, 128th Infantry, which was to attack from The Grove.

Each attack on The Triangle was preceded by heavy mortar fire with high explosives and smoke.



While G Company was attacking from the south, E Company established a shallow bridgehead across Entrance Creek southeast of The Grove. Enemy resistance was unexpectedly heavy. It had once been thought that The Triangle was held lightly, but E and G Companies by their attacks of December 16 - 17 definitely established that it was a carefully prepared defensive area.



General Eichelberger (with field glasses) studies Buna Mission from near Buna Village. Note beached enemy landing barges.

Determinedly, these two companies tried to advance, only to have their every move countered by heavy automatic weapon fire. Despite their best efforts, they failed to gain.

Meanwhile, on December 17 General Byers was evacuated and General Eichelberger assumed direct command of the 32d Division forward elements.

On the Warren Front during December 15 - 17, seven tanks (M-3s) of the 2/6 Australian Field Regiment and the 2/9 Australian Infantry Battalion of the 18th Australian Brigade, arrived via small boat.

The brigade commander, Brigadier George F. Wooten, being

senior to Colonel Martin, was made Warren Force commander by General Eichelberger on December 17, when the 18th Australian Brigade officially became part of Buna Force (US).

During the night of December 17, final arrangements were completed for a coordinated attack on the Warren front the following morning.





HUNA MISSION  
(GOVT STN.)

GIROPA PT

BUNA VILLAGE

Island

## The Triangle

← To Geyva Gardens

128(-2P)  
-37 MM  
Plat. HMG 128  
1 Sec. LMG 128

604015

URBANIA FRONT

### Region Map

Y-27-12 Dec 1942

Y. C. and S. C. 1913

1. Captured Japanese

Captured with a 100x magnification

Scale 1:6,400

A horizontal scale bar with alternating black and white segments. The number '500' is printed at the left end, '0' is at the center, and '500 YDS.' is at the right end.



CAPE ENDAIADERE

STRIP PT.

Old Strip

New Strip

Patrols

1126

35122

123128

2/3121

WARREN FRONT

Sullivan Map

TOOL 17 Dec. 1942



#### 4. Isolation of Buna Mission, and Attack on Warren Front December 18 - 29

This period was characterized by persistent, bloody and desperate attacks which, despite heavy casualties and enemy resistance until death, set the stage for final victory east of the Girua River.

On the Urbana front between December 18 and December 20, the 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry, which had relieved G and E Companies, 128th Infantry, hammered valiantly but in vain against The Triangle. Every attack was thrown back by heavy enemy fire.



Track to The Triangle. Note bunker in background and vegetation.

Our lines were pressed up tight against the enemy positions, but in desperation artillery and mortar fire were called for. Again and again the artillery and mortar batteries hammered the enemy defenses . . . only to fail in the hoped-for neutralization of the Japanese bunkers.

On December 20, the depleted 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry, was relieved by E Company, 127th Infantry; and Colonel Grose, who

was now Regimental Commander of the 127th Infantry, was placed in command of the Urbana Force. After a heavy artillery concentration, E Company attacked . . . only to be thrown back. The Buna Force Commander (General Eichelberger), in recognition of the impregnability of the position, then directed that The Triangle be contained, and proceeded with the execution of his plans for the attack on Buna Mission.

The first step was to drive a corridor through to the sea and isolate the Mission. During December 21, 22 and 23, K and I Companies, 127th Infantry, after crossing Entrance Creek at night under fire, struggled to enlarge the shallow bridgehead on the western side of the Government Gardens. Enemy resistance was stiff; every crossing of the unfordable stream drew heavy enemy fire; every inch on the east bank was sorely contested. Yet, by December 23, the two companies had enlarged the bridgehead sufficiently for an attack by the 2d Battalion, 127th Infantry, the following morning.

Meanwhile, on the night of December 22 - 23, F Company, 127th Infantry, had succeeded in taking The Island in Entrance Creek.



South bridge from The Island to mainland. Note jungle.

During the night of December 23 - 24, L Company, 127th Infantry, moved in position to spearhead the attack across the Gardens, which is perhaps best described by an extract from a letter written by the Buna Force Commander to General MacArthur:

"I think the all time low of my life occurred yesterday (December 24). We had seven line companies available and I had given five of them to Grose to attack but when the rolling barrage started his troops bogged down in the kunai grass, which is about five feet high. He was unable to get reports back from L Company, one platoon of which did go through and arrive at the beach. His right company, I Company, bogged down almost at once . . . Instead of pushing through with a power drive as I had instructed . . . thinking his whole force had bogged down, he delayed his advance. When he found the platoon of L Company had gone through he pushed K Company in. K Company did not acquit itself well and only one officer and eight men went through. As a consequence the platoon of L Company which reached the beach . . . retired."

The attack was renewed on December 25. Contrasting with all previous attacks on the Urbana front, the attack was not preceded with an artillery and mortar preparation but rather with diversionary fire from The Island. While this attack made some headway, enemy resistance was still such that we were stopped short of the beach.

The attacks were continued, but without success. On December 28, the Buna Force Commander directed an attack using assault boats from The Island. The plan called for the landing of troops on the Mission side of the Creek to cover the repair of the bridge from The Island, after which our troops on The Island were to attack across the bridge.

The attack failed, however, when the assault boats landed under heavy enemy fire on the American side of the Creek.

Meanwhile, on December 28, E Company, 127th Infantry, which had been containing The Triangle, found enemy resistance dissipating and attacked successfully. Most of the enemy had evacuated

from the area which was found to be an intricate network of 18 bunkers and connecting fire trenches, largely surrounded by swamps, making understandable the difficulty of its capture.



Japanese fire trenches and bunker in The Triangle.

On December 29, the attack was renewed through the Gardens and this time went through to the sea. By late afternoon our troops were established in well dug-in positions along a corridor reaching across the Gardens and including from 200 to 400 yards of the coast between Buna Mission and Giropa Point.

On the Warren front, the period December 18 - December 29 was also a period of important gains. On December 18, seven M-3 tanks of the 2/6 Australian Field Regiment, followed by the 2/9 Battalion of the 18th Australian Brigade, attacked north through the coconut plantation toward Cape Endaiadere, passing through the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, which followed in their rear mopping up. On the left, the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, wheeled to the west and closely supported the 2/9 Battalion. By the end of the attack, our line ran roughly in a northerly direction from the



eastern end of the New Strip to a point on the coast 600 yards west of Cape Endaiadere.

The attack was heavily opposed. Three of the tanks were knocked out and Australian infantry casualties were high. The network of enemy positions was found to be even more formidable than our patrols had indicated. Bunkers and log barricades were numerous and connecting fire trenches and sniper-posts were a constant source of trouble.

After reorganizing on December 19, the attack was continued on December 20. By the end of the day, our line ran from a point on the coast 500 yards west of Strip Point, southwest to Sinemi Creek and down the Creek to a point just north of the bridge between the strips, and then due south across the New Strip about 150 yards from the bridge.

From left to right, the line was now held by the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry; the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry; the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry and the 2/9 Australian Infantry Battalion.



Tank knocked out in front of log barricade and bunkers in the coconut plantation.

On December 21, the Warren Force reorganized while patrols searched along Sinemi Creek for a suitable crossing. This was found during the ensuing night just north of the dispersal bays at the southeastern end of the Old Strip. The 2/10 Australian Infantry Battalion established a bridgehead over which three companies were moved December 23. During December 23, the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry, attacked down the New Strip and at 1230L overran the now famed bridge between the strips to continue its advance and joined the 2/10 Battalion in a line, facing west, 300 yards across the Old Strip.

The 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, was now dropped back in reserve near the bridge between the strips where four tanks were waiting while the bridge was repaired, under fire, by American engineers and infantry.

On December 24, the tanks attacked up the northeastern side of the Old Strip in support of the 2/10 Battalion; while the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry, attacked across the strip and then up its southwestern side abreast the 2/10 Battalion. Enemy resistance was from scattered positions on each side of the strip and from a system of bunkers, at the northwestern end of the strip, from which the Japanese were delivering machinegun and dual-purpose AA fire on our ground troops.

During December 25 - December 28, the line inched forward, infiltrating enemy positions and knocking them out one at a time. By 1600L December 29, the right of the line was based on Sinemi Creek about 800 yards from the mouth. From this point, the line ran southwest to bend in an arc around the dispersal bays at the northwestern end of the strip and then due west for about 750 yards. In order, from left to right, the line was held by C and A Companies, 2/10 Battalion; C and A Companies, 128th Infantry; C Company, 126th

Infantry; and B and D Companies, 2/10 Battalion.



Enemy bunkers near bridge between Old and New Strips.

Meanwhile, deep in the Warren rear area, the 2/12 Australian Infantry Battalion and eleven M-3 tanks of the 2/6 Australian Field Regiment were moving toward the front.

Thus ended the period December 18 through December 29. The stage was now set for the Buna Force Commander to launch his final attacks east of the Girua River.



The bridge between the Old and the New Strips.





BUNA MISSION  
(GOV'T. STN.)

GIROPA PT

BUNA VILLAGE

128 (-2 Flan)  
1-37 MM  
1 Plot. HMG 126  
1 Sec. LMG 128

Island

G 127  
L 127  
M 127

Generator

The Wangle

2 126

URBANA FRONT

1700L 23 Dec. 1942

Captured Bunkers  
Captured Bulwarks  
Captured Fire Trenches

Scale 1:8,400

500 0 500 YDS







STRIP PT.

Old Strip

NEW STRIP

# WARREN FRONT

Situation Map

2000L 18 Dec 1942

Captured Breastworks

Captured Bunkers

Captured Fire Trenches







STRIP PT.

Stream

Creek

101 128

128

Old Strip

128

New Strip

126

FRONT LINE

Position of the 28th

Captured Positions

Japanese Air Base







STRIP PT.

2/9 ☒ 2/9

121210

B2S2/10

C 2/10 A

A 2/10

128

CD 125

Old Sing

New Strip

WARM FRONT

150000

1

— **Solution:** 100





## 5. Capture of Buna Mission

December 30 - January 5

This was the period of victory east of the Girua River.

On the Urbana front during December 30, the corridor isolating Buna Mission was gradually enlarged.

On December 31, at 0430L, E Company, 127th Infantry, and F Company, 128th Infantry, pushed across the mouth of Entrance Creek and established positions on the sand spit west of Buna Mission.

During the same day, the depleted 2d Battalion, 126th Infantry, attacked beyond The Triangle to advance 300 yards to the east. By nightfall, we held the whole of the Government Garden area, and one of our patrols operating to the southeast established contact with the Warren Force left.

On January 1, G Companies, 127th and 128th Infantry, moved into position in the corridor in preparation for an attack January 2. While these companies were moving in, C Company, 127th, on the left of the corridor pushed forward some 150 yards.

The attack of January 2 was preceded by artillery and mortar fire, after which the infantry moved forward from the northwestern side of the corridor toward Buna Mission. Progress was slow; there was heavy cross-fire from the numerous enemy bunkers. G Company, 127th Infantry, spearheaded the attack with G Company, 128th Infantry, in support. Other supporting elements in the attack were A, C, F, I and L Companies, 127th Infantry, and, from the spit, F Company, 128th Infantry. Despite determined enemy resistance, the attack continued to gain momentum, finally over-running Buna Mission.

Of the attack, General Eichelberger wrote:

"At 4:30 P.M. I crossed the bridge (from The Island) after C Company had passed and I saw American troops with their bellies out of the mud and their eyes in the sun circling unafraid around the bunkers. It was one of the grandest sights I have ever seen . . the 127th Infantry found its soul . . . "



General Eichelberger crossing from The Island to Buna Mission.

With the Mission in hand, C Company, 127th Infantry, was moved in support of B Company, 127th Infantry, to attack toward Giropa Point from the southeastern side of the corridor. The attack was a success and by nightfall the Buna Force Commander controlled the entire coastline east of the Girua River.

On Buna Mission proper, 190 enemy were buried. There was no count taken of the number of enemy who attempted to swim out to sea only to be picked off by our troops. Some enemy, no doubt, escaped into the swamps while others were buried without count in demolished bunkers. (For a count of enemy dead, etc., see ORDER OF BATTLE).

On the Warren front during December 30 - 31, there was a general reorganization, after which an attack supported by eleven M-3 tanks was launched toward Giropa Point. The attack jumped off at 0800L 1 January and at 0930L reached the coast between Giropa Point and the mouth of Sinemi Creek.

The attack had not been heavily opposed; only one tank was

knocked out and our casualties were light. By nightfall only two pockets of enemy resistance remained on the Warren front: one between the northeast dispersal bays and the mouth of the creek, and the other in the swamp area about 300 yards south of the Giropa Creek mouth.

During January 2, these pockets were attacked and on January 3 they were wiped out.

The attack of January 1 had been led by the 2/12 Australian Infantry Battalion and the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, supported by the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, and the 2/10 Australian Infantry Battalion.

The enemy pocket south of Giropa Creek mouth was wiped out by the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry; and the pocket in the dispersal bay area, by the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry.

Thus ended the fighting east of the Girua River. For many days after the last organized resistance had been broken on January 3, enemy stragglers were ferreted out and killed or captured (mostly killed) by the troops of Buna Force (US). Upon completion of mopping up, these forces were assigned beach defense missions, with the exception of the 127th Infantry and the 18th Australian Brigade which were to assist in the neutralization of enemy resistance west of the Girua River.









# BUNA DEFENSE PLAN (JAPANESE)

As compiled at the end of the campaign

- Breastworks
- Snipers
- Fire Trenches
- ✕ Bombing Site
- Anti-Aircraft Positions

Scale 1:6,400

500

0

500 YDS.

## 6. The Sanananda Operation

January 6 - 22

(Note: It is not within the scope of this report to give a detailed account of the Japanese defeat in the theater west of the Girua River. However, in order to complete the picture of the entire campaign, the following brief resume is given.)

Between December 9, when Gona fell, and the fall of Buna Mission, January 2, there was little progress made in the zone west of the Girua River.

In general, the enemy held a triangular area based along the coast between Cape Killerton and Tarakena with its apex on the Soputa track approximately three-and-a-half miles south of Sanananda Point.

Several hundred yards north of the apex of the triangle, our troops had established a road-block which was surrounded by the enemy.

Allied troops engaging the enemy west of the Girua were commanded by Major General G. E. Vasey (Australian), and included the Seventh Australian Division reinforced by the 126th Infantry (less 1st and 2d Battalions), and elements of the 127th Infantry.

Following the fall of Buna Mission, elements of the 127th Infantry attacked up the narrow coastal strip and through the adjoining mangrove swamp toward Tarakena. It was a hazardous operation. The swamp was as bitter an enemy as the Japanese. The narrow coastal strip, by its very nature, exposed our lines of communication proportionally to the rate of advance.

On January 8, Tarakena was captured and the advance continued towards Giruwa . . . and some of the most difficult fighting of the campaign.

Meanwhile, the 18th Australian Brigade and three tanks of



the 2/6 Australian Field Regiment were transferred from Buna to the Sanananda front north of Soputa. Also, elements of the 163 Infantry, 41st U. S. Division, began arriving from Port Moresby by air.

On January 12, elements of the 18th Brigade supported by the tanks of the 2/6 Field Regiment attacked north of Soputa, but met heavy resistance which knocked out all three tanks and rendered the attack abortive.

On the following day, General Eichelberger was placed in command of Advance New Guinea Forces including all Allied troops north of the Owen Stanley Range. Vigorous patrolling was at once directed in an effort to obtain a more accurate picture of the Japanese positions. The patrols operating through the swamps caught the enemy at the beginning of a withdrawal. An Allied attack was immediately ordered. Allied troops were then able to wipe out all the Japanese area which had so long held up the Allied advance.

The 18th Brigade pushed rapidly up the Cape Killerton track meeting slight resistance; and the 163d Infantry drove forward up the Sanananda track and developed the enemy's main pocket of resistance approximately 2200 yards south of Sanananda. By January 15 the enemy area north of the road block was mopped up.

On reaching the coast, elements of the 18th Brigade attacked to the east and on January 18, reached Giruwa, where it met the 127th Infantry which had fought its way up the coast from Tarakena.

The 163d Infantry continued its attacks against the enemy pocket on the Sanananda track until the afternoon of January 21 when they were able to report that the Japanese were softening rapidly. By January 22, all organized enemy resistance west of the Girua River was wiped out.

During the campaign on the Sanananda front (including Gona), approximately 3000 enemy were killed and 130 taken prisoner. The

great majority of the enemy had fought on the Kokoda trail and were ravaged by hunger and disease. Their morale, according to prisoners of war, was thoroughly shattered when, on the night of January 16 - 17, their high command removed wounded from a barge in which they were to be evacuated . . . and themselves departed leaving their troops the sole honor of "a glorious death".



## IV ORDER OF BATTLE

### 1. Enemy.

General.--No effort will be made in this report to trace the enemy chain of command because conclusive evidence is not available. Of relative information in hand, two facts stand out: it seems fairly conclusive that the supreme commander of Japanese troops in New Guinea was (and is at the time of writing) Major General Oda; and that he succeeded Major General Tomitaro Horii who drowned when his raft turned over on the flooded Kumusi River during the retreat from Wairopi in November.

Identifications.--The Japanese left flank in the Cape Endaia-dere area was held principally by the 3d Battalion, 229th Regiment, with an estimated strength of 465, and the Yamamoto Butai with an approximate strength of 300.

The Japanese right flank in the Buna Village area was held principally by two Marine groups: the Yasuda Butai and the Tsukioka Butai. Their combined minimum strength is estimated at 400.

Attached to the above flank units and filling out the remainder of the Japanese perimeter were elements of other units including a heavy anti-aircraft unit, tentatively identified as the 73d Independent Unit, with a minimum strength of 100; a battery of mountain artillery thought to be from the 3d Battalion, 55th Field Artillery and numbering not less than 100 troops; some remnants of the 144th Infantry totaling about 100; a minimum of 300 miscellaneous troops including engineer, medical, signal, and supply personnel; and approximately 400 laborers of the 14th and 15th Construction units.

Collectively speaking the Japanese troops in the sector were thoroughly seasoned campaigners. Further, they were largely fresh troops, with the exception of certain elements, in that they had

not taken part in the drive on Port Moresby and the subsequent retreat.

### Brief Histories.

3d Battalion, 229th Infantry Regiment.--This unit was commanded by Major Haihachi Kimmotsu and was known as the Kimmotsu Butai. It was a part of the 38th Division and had seen previous action near Canton and later at Hong Kong. The regiment arrived in Rabaul from Java on October 30, 1942. From Rabaul the 1st and 2d Battalions were sent to Guadalcanal and the 3d Battalion to the Buna coast where it landed November 18th.

Yamamoto Butai.--This unit was commanded by Col. Hiroshi Yamamoto. It left Japan in early October as a part of a replacement section numbering 1000 officers and enlisted men for the 144th Regiment (Kusunose Butai), which had been decimated in the Owen Stanley Range. The unit arrived in Rabaul on October 30, 1942. Shortly thereafter, Col. Yamamoto was ordered with a detachment of 300 to the Buna combat zone. They arrived on approximately November 13. The plan was for Col. Yamamoto to assume command of the 144th Regiment, Col. Kusunose having become a casualty. However, on Yamamoto's arrival he was instructed to take a part of his detachment to the Buna - Cape Endaiadere sector. There he was placed in command of all Army units and instructed to cooperate with Col. Yasuda of the Naval force (Marines). The replacements in the Yamamoto Butai were well trained and, with individual exceptions, experienced in many of Japan's previous campaigns including the Philippines, China, Malaya, etc.

Yasuda Butai.--This unit was commanded by Col. Yoshitatsu Yasuda. It was a Naval Force (Marines) and while definite identification is lacking, it is known that the men of the unit had fought in China, Malaya, Singapore and in various islands of the South and

Southwest Pacific Area. The unit had been in Buna for several months before contact with the Americans was made in the latter part of November. Beside the Marines, Col. Yasuda commanded the elements of the 14th and 15th Construction units in the Buna - Cape Endaiadere area.

14th Construction unit.--Little is known about this unit except that it is believed to have been predominantly Japanese coolie labor. It came to Buna in August. However, there are credible indications that a large part of it was withdrawn to Giruwa during the latter part of October, leaving only a detachment of 200 in the Buna area.

15th Construction unit.--This unit was commanded by Naval Technician Atsushi. It arrived at Rabaul August 5, 1942. It included 102 Japanese laborers as section leaders, some Chinese, 500 Formosans and 1500 Korean laborers. It left Rabaul August 11 and landed in the Buna area August 13. The 500 Formosans were attached to an Army unit at Gona and the remainder of the unit was sent to Buna on August 18 to work on the air strips. On August 28, most of the unit was ordered to Giruwa to construct a road to Port Moresby, leaving only 230 in Buna. Of these 230, forty-two were Japanese and the remainder Koreans.

Strength:--The enemy's strength in the Buna area (Buna Village - Cape Endaiadere) was approximately 2200 at the time of the meeting engagement. Of this number, 1450 were buried or captured by our troops during the campaign. The remainder may be accounted for as (1) buried by the enemy, (2) evacuated by barge because of wounds or disease, (3) killed while trying to escape out to sea on rafts, small boats or by swimming, (4) sealed uncaptured in caved-in bunkers, and (5) escaping through the swamps to the Sanananda area.



## 2. Allied.

General.--Heading the Allied chain of command in the Buna Campaign was General MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, SWPA, with Advanced General Headquarters in Port Moresby. The next lower link was General Sir Thomas Blamey, who performed the dual role of GOC, Land Forces, SWPA, and GOC, New Guinea Force with headquarters at Port Moresby.

The combined American and Australian troops north of the Owen Stanley Range were under Lieutenant General E. F. Herring, GOC, Advanced New Guinea Force, with headquarters initially near Soputa. Late in December, 1942, this headquarters was moved to the east bank of the Samboga River near Dobodura.

Under Advanced New Guinea Force the chain of command led to the two Allied Forces in the forward area: west of the Girua River, Major General G. A. Vasey commanded the Seventh Australian Division reinforced by part of the 126th Infantry (US) in the Sanananda - Gona area; and east of the Girua River, until December 1, were elements of the 32d U. S. Division. On December 1, Lieutenant General Eichelberger commanding I Corps (US) assumed command of the troops in the zone east of the Girua, with the I Corps (US) Advanced Headquarters near Henahamburi. On December 7, Headquarters, I Corps (US) and Headquarters, 32d U. S. Division were merged to create Headquarters, Buna Force (US) which was commanded by Lieutenant General Eichelberger until the end of the campaign.

Buna Force (US) was divided into three elements: the Urbana Force on the left flank in the Buna Village - Buna Mission area; the Warren Force on the right flank in the Cape Endaiadere area; and the Alma Force which was the service of supply.

After the fall of Buna Mission, General MacArthur returned to General Headquarters, SWPA, in Australia with the members of his

advanced headquarters and General Blamey returned to Land Headquarters, SWPA, also in Australia. As a result of their departures from the combat area, Lieutenant General Herring became GOC, New Guinea Force at Port Moresby and Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger became GOC, Advanced New Guinea Force with headquarters near Dobodura.

Charts #1 and #2 (following page 47) give a graphical presentation of the Buna Force (US) chain of command, including the composition of forces.

#### Brief Histories:

The 32d U. S. Division, a National Guard unit from Michigan and Wisconsin, was inducted into Federal Service October 15, 1940, and sent to Camp Beauregard, Louisiana.

In February, 1941, the division was moved to Camp Livingston, Louisiana. It participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941, was alerted in February, 1942, and sent to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Shortly after its arrival at Fort Devens, the division was ordered overland to the San Francisco area. It arrived in Australia April 22, 1942.

Between the time the division was inducted and sent overseas, it supplied the usual cadres and received Selective Service replacements. It had a small percentage of reserve officers and the authorized quota of regular officers.

After twice being moved in Australia, the division (less its artillery) was sent to New Guinea with the last elements arriving in November. The Buna Campaign was its first combat experience.

The 163d U. S. Infantry, 41st U. S. Division, was a National Guard regiment from Montana inducted into Federal Service September 16, 1940. While in the United States its home station was Fort Lewis, Washington. Along with the remainder of the division it supplied many cadres until just before the outbreak of the war. Following



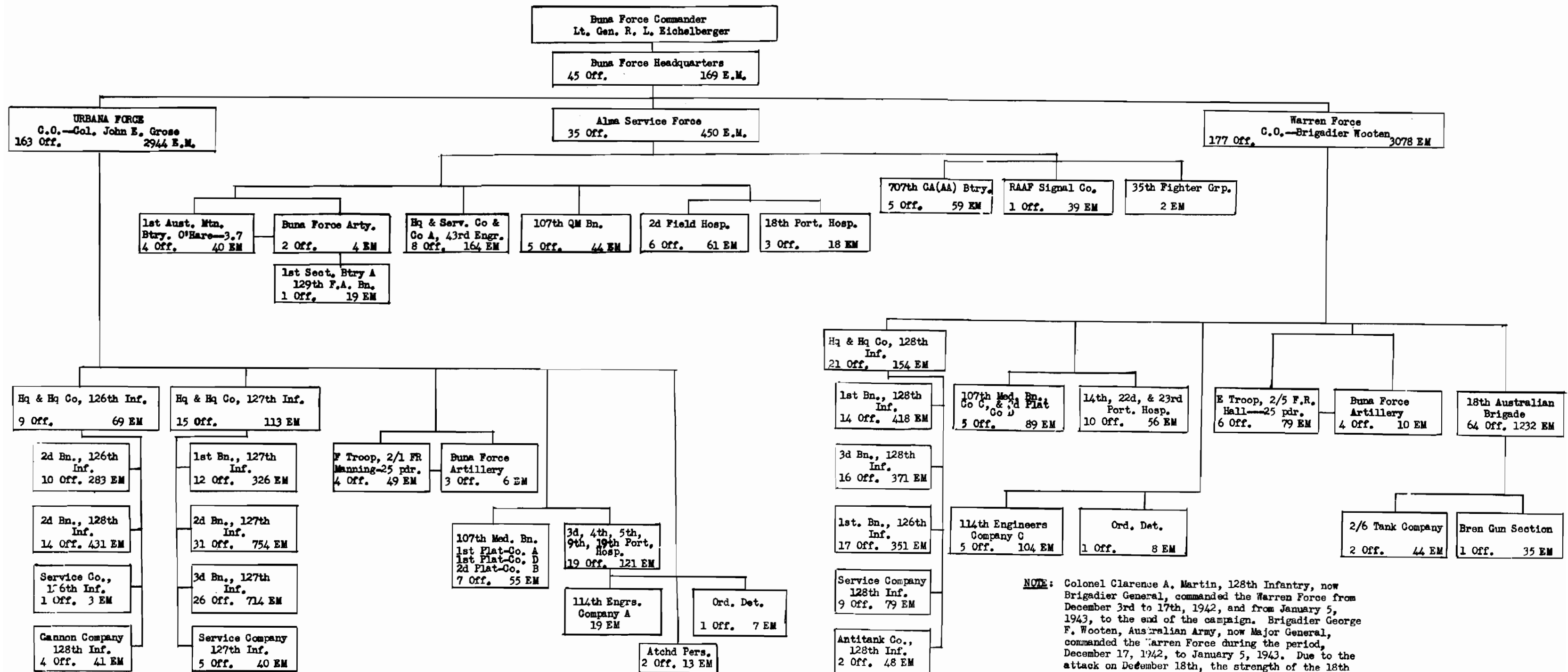
the opening of hostilities the division was on coastal defense work in the Northwest Pacific area. The 163d Infantry arrived in Australia April 6, 1942, and was sent to New Guinea in mid-December.

The Sanananda Campaign was the first combat experience for the 163d Infantry. Other elements of the 41st Division did not participate in the Sanananda Campaign which ended officially on January 22, 1943.

The Seventh Australian Division and the 18th Australian Brigade had seen previous action. Units of each force had fought in Greece, Crete, Syria and North Africa.

Strength Reports.--For data concerning strength of American units see Appendix, Annex #1, G-1 Report. For battle losses see Appendix, Annex #4, Inclosure E, Medical Report.

**CHART #1**  
CHAIN OF COMMAND AND STRENGTH OF BUNA FORCES  
AS OF DECEMBER 19, 1942.

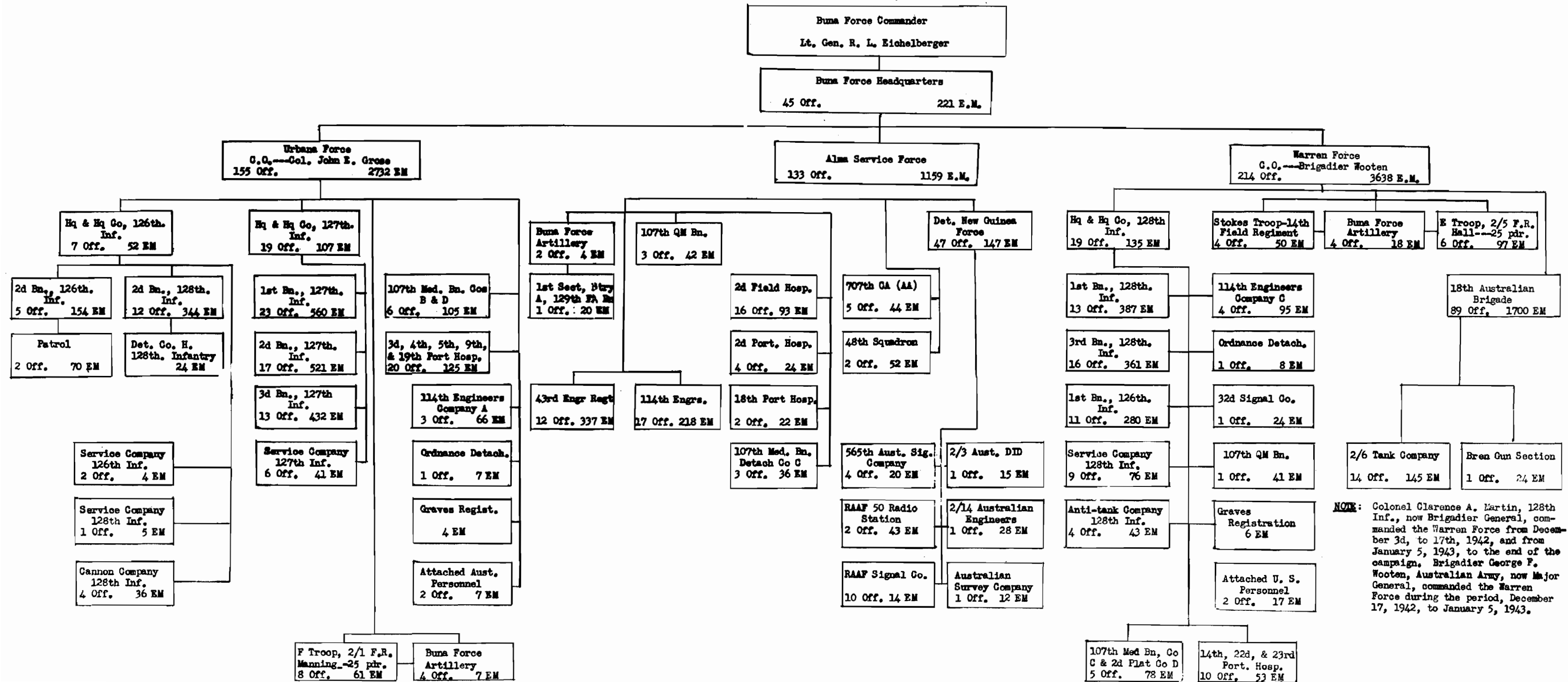


**NOTE:** Colonel Clarence A. Martin, 128th Infantry, now Brigadier General, commanded the Warren Force from December 3rd to 17th, 1942, and from January 5, 1943, to the end of the campaign. Brigadier George F. Wooten, Australian Army, now Major General, commanded the Warren Force during the period, December 17, 1942, to January 5, 1943. Due to the attack on December 18th, the strength of the 18th Australian Brigade on this date, December 19, 1942, appears much reduced.



CHART #2

CHAIN OF COMMAND AND STRENGTH OF Buna Forces AS  
OF JANUARY 5th, 1943.



**NOTE:** Colonel Clarence A. Martin, 128th Inf., now Brigadier General, commanded the Warren Force from December 3d, to 17th, 1942, and from January 5, 1943, to the end of the campaign. Brigadier George F. Wooten, Australian Army, now Major General, commanded the Warren Force during the period, December 17, 1942, to January 5, 1943.